

OUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Port of Leith Housing Association (PoLHA) has revealed a five year Business Plan for 2011 - 16. According to that, the Association is on target to deliver at least 600 new homes by 2015.

Chief Executive Keith Anderson has warned that Edinburgh's growing acute need and demand for affordable housing, combined with budget cuts, will make conditions for development challenging. But the Association remains committed to creating new high quality, mixed use neighbourhoods.

At the heart of the document are commitments to:

- 1) improve the value of and satisfaction with services to customers;
- 2) develop and deliver a wider choice of affordable housing products;
- 3) to support and promote inclusive communities;
- 4) and to empower staff to give their best.

Amongst key activities for 2011/12 are the development of a new Customer Charter and consulting on standards for service delivery. But the overall vision remains the same - "making our homes and neighbourhoods great places to live in".



ROYAL WEDDING FEVER!

Residents at St Nicholas Court enjoyed a right Royal party to mark the wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton on 29th April.

Formal dress was the order of the day, including hats, and glasses were raised to the happy couple. A great time was had by all!

News

The Annual Tenants' Gathering is set for 24th September at Out of the Blue in Dalmeny Street. Watch this space for more information in the Autumn Port Call.

The first annual Leith Rotary Dragon Boat Challenge, now to be held on 3rd September, is expected to be the largest event of its kind ever held in Scotland. It will feature up to 50 boats.



COLIN McLEAN

Port of Leith Housing Association would like to pay tribute to Colin McLean, Property Manager Investment, who died in a tragic accident last month while on holiday with his family at the age of only 42.

Colin joined PoLHA in February 2009, having previously worked as Development Manager at Margaret Blackwood Housing Association. Keith Anderson, Chief Executive at PoLHA, said:

“We are deeply saddened by Colin’s death and would like to pass on our sincere condolences to his family.

“Colin was a wonderful presence within our organisation and an integral part of our team. He will be sorely missed by all those who had the privilege of knowing and working with him.”

PolHA OPENS NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Port of Leith Housing Association (PoLHA) received around 100 bids per property for its new housing development in Granton. The 17-flat block on West Granton Road is now complete and tenants will be moving in the coming weeks.

This is the Association’s first development in Granton. Last year it open a 102-flat development in Newhaven and is currently building in Leith as it looks to expand its reach throughout Leith and the Waterfront. Keith Anderson, Chief Executive at PoLHA, said:

“We are delighted to be able to offer these new, high-quality homes to our tenants.



“Affordable, safe and secure homes in communities people want to live are at the heart of the regeneration of Leith, Granton and the Waterfront. The overwhelming demand for this development shows the significant need there is for this type of accommodation in this area.

“This is an important move for us into Granton and is important in bringing communities together.”

Five flats have their own balcony, two have patios, and two have been designed for wheelchair users. There are a mix of one and two-bedroom flats and a communal garden area, as well as secure car park.

MOVING TO A LAND DOWNUNDER

Professor Hal Pawson has left PoLHA after being a Board Member for the last 13 years. He is moving to become Professor of Housing Research and Policy at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. Reflecting on his time at PoLHA, Prof Pawson said:



“I am particularly looking forward to working with Australia’s housing associations in what is currently a small but rapidly growing part of the housing market downunder. I will also, of course, continue to follow Port of Leith’s progress with interest. In the 13 years I’ve been a board member, Port of Leith has gone from strength to strength and it has been a pleasure to be part of this.”

Keith Anderson, Chief Executive, praised Prof Pawson’s contribution saying:

“Whilst we are sorry to see Hal go, I am delighted to see that his undoubted skills and knowledge in housing are to be shared for the benefit of housing associations in Australia. He has made a significant contribution to the work of PoLHA in the last 13 years and we wish him well in his new life in Sydney.”

CUSTOMER SERVICES

Did you know that you can call Customer Services during office hours to give details of a repair, organise repair inspections, get information on the balance of your rent and even make a rent payment? Call them, with your enquiries, on:

Freephone 0808 100 0403

*(you will be charged to use this number from a mobile —
please use 0131 554 0403 if doing so)*

NEW PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT OFFICER



Ian Treger has joined PoLHA in the newly created post of Performance Officer. Previously, he was a Senior Homeless Officer with Midlothian Council and a Housing Officer with West Lothian Council.

A long title but an important job that will see Ian working with colleagues to enhance business performance to ensure that everything that PoLHA does reflects best practice.

That means Ian will be looking to identify further improvements to the services we provide to you. Ian says of his new role:

“I am pleased to have joined the Association and aim to develop our services to our customers to be both modernising and improving.”

You said, we did...

In late 2009, we met with a group of tenants to consider our reception service.

We responded to your suggestions made for improvements with quick easy changes, beginning with higher chairs so if you have a mobility issue, it is easier to sit down. A large interview room was created from two small ones so that we can now accommodate several people, buggies or wheelchairs with ease.

A more difficult request involved a physical change to provide a larger reception desk to allow two staff members to be at the desk, speeding up our service at times of peak demand at reception.

There has been a slight delay in responding to this because we were reviewing the whole staff structure and needed to make other office alterations following this.

This is now complete and we are getting the necessary permissions and warrants from the Council to progress these improvements. We hope the changes can be made by end of summer and that you will like the changes once they are completed.

CHANGES TO INCOME-RELATED BENEFITS

Staged increases in the rates of non-dependant deductions for income-related benefits started from April this year.

By April 2014, these increases will bring the rates to the level they would have been had they been fully uprated since 2001.

By 2014, the deductions will be between 60% and 90% higher, meaning some tenants will no longer qualify for Housing Benefit.

2010	2011
£7.40	£9.40
£17.00	£21.55
£23.35	£29.60
£38.20	£48.45
£43.50	£55.20
£47.75	£60.60

Please note the non-dependant deduction in Council Tax Benefit will also be changing.

If you have any questions about how this might impact you, please call the CAB Money Advice Service on 0131 553 8745.



SAVE ENERGY— AND MONEY TOO!

It's not just in the winter months that we should be careful how we use our energy. Even as we hit the summer months, there are still ways to be energy aware and save some cash. Here are a few simple tips:



Close curtains at dusk to stop heat escaping through the windows.



Set thermostats correctly:
hot water thermostats at 60 – 65°C
room thermostats between 18 – 21°C
(or 23°C if there are elderly or very young people in the home).



Avoid placing furniture in front of radiators.



Switch off! An appliance uses 90% of its energy while on standby.



Don't overfill pans or kettles – you waste energy heating extra water.

Cook with lids on pans and match ring size to saucepan size.



Wait until you have a full load before using your washing machine. Use a lower washing temperature (between 30 – 40°C).

Tumble dryers cost a lot to run. Dry clothes outside or on a clothes rail for FREE.

Edinburgh Furniture Initiative (EFI Assist) Discount Card Scheme

EFI Assist's Discount Card Scheme is aimed at helping people on low incomes and benefits to access good quality furniture at discounted prices. To find out how to get a Discount Card, please phone your housing officer on 0131 554 0403 or call EFI Assist on 0131 557 7904 or email them on assist@foursquare.org.uk.

OPENING HOURS FOR CAB MONEY ADVICE SERVICE

Monday:
9.00am–1.00pm

Tues, Wed & Thurs:
9.00am – 5.00pm

Based in PoLHA's office, the Money Advice Service can give you confidential advice on debt issues, energy efficiency, energy bills and the services of Credit Unions and other banking and financial services.

Fiona Neilson, Money Advice Worker, can also help you check your benefits entitlement and advise you about the effect of changes to the benefits system on your income.

For a chat, in confidence, please call 0131 553 8745.

**Did you know
that PoLHA's
Out-of-Hours
Emergency
Number is:**

**0800 783
7937**



What's your problem?

“What’s your Problem” aims to help you with queries from housing benefit to tax to general housing queries. If you have a question, drop it in to PoLHA’s office or email it to info@polha.co.uk.



I am sometimes disturbed by noise from my neighbours. Is there anything I can do about it?

Low level noise can be upsetting and you are right to be thinking about how to tackle this. So what can you do?

1. Try approaching your neighbour in the first instance, as they may not be aware they are causing you a problem
2. Explain why their behaviour is causing a problem to you
3. Remain calm and polite at all times
4. Do not threaten or behave in a threatening manner - this will not resolve the problem
5. Be prepared to compromise
6. Walk away if your neighbour continues to be unreasonable

If this doesn’t work, then you must start recording the incidents that are causing a nuisance and report them to the office.

We will need information to help you, so make a note of times, dates and details of what happened and who was affected. Evidence from other neighbours who were also affected is also useful.

We will then work with you to get the problem sorted.



I am currently renting—are there any other options?

There are a number of things you could do:

1. you could apply for shared ownership which means that you buy 25%, 50% or 75% of a property and pay an occupancy charge to the housing association for the portion you don’t own;
2. you could apply to a housing association for shared equity, where you would generally buy between 60% and 80% of the property but do not pay any rental element to the association. *Please note that Port of Leith HA does not participate in this particular scheme but others in Edinburgh do;*
3. you could look into the possibility of shared equity with private house builders – many are now offering this option;
4. there is no one place where information is held on these schemes so some research is necessary (the internet is a good place to start, e.g. Key to Choice);
5. and there is also a charity that helps disabled people to resolve their housing problems. Ownership Options in Scotland aims to enable equal access for disabled people to own their own homes by providing free information and advice to disabled people and their families.

For further information and to apply online, visit their website www.ownershipoptions.org.uk or telephone 0131 247 1400 and an application form can be sent to you.

HOW YOU CAN HELP BY PROVIDING ACCESS FOR THE STOCK CONDITION SURVEY

In recent months, you will have received a letter from us explaining that, over the next two years, we want to review the condition of every property we own. It's a big undertaking but your co-operation and help is essential because it will:

1. help PoLHA in planning and implementing its investment strategies for the next 30 years
2. identify how much of our stock still needs work to meet the Government's Scottish Housing Quality Standard
3. help us plan cyclical work, such as external painting, replacing windows, lift refurbishments etc
4. inform us as to our potential cost liability for repairs to buildings where we are not the majority owner
5. allow us to assess the best options for future expenditure on the Association's housing stock
6. let us collect the necessary information to enable the Association to establish the energy rating of each home.

F3 Building Surveyors have been commissioned to carry out this project and to report back their findings to PoLHA.

They will visit each of our properties and do a 30 minute internal and external survey. They need access to every room and cupboard that has a fuse board, water or electricity meter or central heating boiler in it. But they will only look around—they will not cause any disturbance such as moving furniture, carpets or intrusive inspection.

If your home is to be surveyed in the autumn, F3 will be in touch soon to give you a time and date for the survey. If that's not suitable, please call F3 direct on 0131 554 8050 to rearrange the appointment.

They will leave you a PoLHA Household Composition Survey, which ensures we have up-to-date information. Give it to the surveyor or post it to us in the pre-paid envelope.



Please ask to see the surveyor's identification (ID) and, if you are unsure, please call F3 directly and a member of staff will be able to confirm the surveyor's identity.

If you would like any more information about the Stock Condition Survey, please call us on Freephone 0808 100 0403 or 0131 554 0403.



TOiL SCORES ANOTHER SUCCESS!



Paul McMahon joined the TOiL programme in May 2010. His placement with Hot-el-apartments in August 2010 included working with the company on a range of sales, marketing and administration tasks in a hotel/serviced apartment setting at the Waterfront in Edinburgh.

TOiL provided him with all the workwear he needed to work in the sales and marketing division of the business and supported Paul's application to obtain an ILA (Individual Learning Account) and obtain his Heartstart Emergency First Aid qualification.

Following his experience at Hot-el-Apartments, Paul was supported by the TOiL team in his job searching. This included help with job applications, writing his CV and giving him the opportunity to complete a formal mock interview with an external employer.

Paul was delighted when, following completion of the TOiL programme, he was successful in obtaining a two year contract with Port of Leith Housing Association as a trainee Customer Services Assistant. He said:

"TOiL has helped me gain new skills in an employment setting which really boosted my confidence. The TOiL programme helped prepare me for applying for a full-time position and successfully achieve a job which I really enjoy doing".

Useful Telephone Numbers

Out of Hours Emergency Number:	0800 783 7937
Customer Services (office hours):	0808 100 0403
<i>(you will be charged to use this number from a mobile—please use 0131 554 0403 if doing so)</i>	
Fax:	031 555 1504
Email:	info@polha.co.uk
Transco (gas emergency)	0800 111 999
Scottish Water	0845 600 8855
Scottish Power	0845 272 7999
Citizens' Advice (Leith)	0131 553 5984
Noise Stoppers	0131 311 3131
Crimestoppers	0800 555 111
City of Edinburgh Council	
Main switchboard	0131 200 2000
Council Tax & benefits office	0131 469 5000
Pest Control	0131 666 2623
Special Uplift	0131 529 3030

Port Call Deadlines

If you would like to contribute to Port Call, the deadline for the autumn edition is 1st Aug 2011. Send comments, questions or information to info@polha.co.uk

